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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000110

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ET](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTIAN GOVERNMENT REACTS TO TRAIN EXPLOSION

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 00089

[B](#). 03 DJIBOUTI 2241

[C](#). 03 DJIBOUTI 01453

[D](#). 03 DJIBOUTI 01674

[E](#). 03 DJIBOUTI 01801

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER C. BEAMER FOR REASONS 1.5 (D) AND (E)

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (U) As outlined in Ref. A on the morning of January 18, 2004 an explosive device detonated aboard a passenger car of the Ethiopian/Djibouti railway. This explosion follows close on the heels of explosions just within the Ethiopian frontier of fuel trucks, and is one of several explosions on the railway in recent months. While speculation abounds regarding the motives behind the explosion, the Djiboutian Government has reacted strongly to the event but appears to lack the capacity to coordinate an effective response. The Government has reached out to the international community for assistance and taken some measures it hopes will prevent future explosions. A related result of the explosion is the pressure applied to Interior Minister Wais to close the refugee transit camp of Aour-Aoussa (Ref. C, D, E) which is located approximately 15 kilometers from Dassbiyo (site of the train explosion) and houses several thousand ethnic Oromo Ethiopians.

MOTIVES

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[¶](#)2. (C) Post cannot offer more than speculation as to the cause of these recent attacks on commercial lines between Djibouti and Ethiopia. Djiboutian officials and businessmen postulate that the strong trucking lobby in Ethiopia tied to President Meles is trying to put the kiss of death on the commercial railway. This seems unlikely given the poor state of the railway and its relatively minor percentage of commercial traffic. It is significant, however, that two commercial fuel trucks were attacked, one in Addis and one just inside the Ethiopian frontier near the Djiboutian border town of Galafi in recent weeks. If there is a relation between the trucking industry and the train explosions, is it a tit for tat exchange? A more likely theory has scattered elements of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) expressing their discontent with the Ethiopian establishment and the Djiboutian authorities who recently collaborated with them in the expulsion of some thousands of Ethiopians living illegally in Djibouti (Ref. C, D, E). But if this were so, why does the OLF not take credit? We do not think so as Oromos make up some 40% of the population, have an autonomous district which they administer themselves, are represented at the National level by an Oromo President, and have a strong international lobby including London based human rights groups. These bombings would not seem to benefit OLF interests in that light.

GODJ RESPONSE

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[¶](#)3. (C) President Guelleh has intervened personally and has all GODJ pistons firing to address his concerns. Despite a State Department PM funded demining program in the military and a DS ATA trained explosive incident countermeasure (EIC) squad in the National Police, the capacity of Djiboutian security forces to respond to such incidents remains limited. Reports on the very nature of the explosive device have ranged from a C-4 charge to an anti-personnel mine. The demining unit of the Djiboutian military has been dispatched to border checkpoints with extended mirrors to conduct inspections of all transport crossing the frontier. Six people have been arrested and arraigned in conjunction with the investigation but Post does not have details of the case.

The Djiboutian Minister of International Cooperation Ali Youssouf called Ethiopian DCM Yeshi into his office following the explosion and told her that the train would be halted until the conclusion of the investigation and the Aour-Aoussa refugee camp would be closed immediately. Yeshi told post that she feels a third party is behind the explosions, unattached to either the Djiboutian or the Ethiopian governments.

REFUGEES

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14. (U) Local UNHCR Representative Collins Asare reported that the GODJ has since retreated from its rash decision to immediately close the Aour-Aoussa transit center. The Government eligibility commission established for the asylum seekers at Aour-Aoussa and currently in place in Ali-Sabieh has revamped its efforts to hear the cases before it and has announced that all refugees in Aour-Aoussa will have a status determination before March 31. Those who are found to be eligible will be incorporated into one of the two existing refugee camps in Djibouti and those found ineligible will be repatriated to their country of origin. At that time the camp will be closed.

COMMENT

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15. (C) While the recent explosion should not be seen as an immediate threat to U.S. interests in Djibouti, the event underlines a continuing need for increased Djiboutian capabilities for them to fully participate in the GWOT. Djibouti's leadership is committed and will talk its way through any legislation or agreement or support to prove that is on board for the GWOT, but its capacity to offer real assistance on the ground is limited. Additionally, questions that are fundamental to the GWOT such as nationality, immigration, and frontiers are still gray in the wild west of East Africa.

SMITH